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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1666 (2006) of 31 March 2006, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) until 15 October 2006. It provides an update on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia since my report of 17 March 2006 (S/2006/173).

2. My Special Representative for Georgia, Heidi Tagliavini, continued to head UNOMIG. She was assisted in this task by the Chief Military Observer, Major General Niaz Muhammad Khan Khattak (Pakistan). The strength of UNOMIG on 1 June 2006 stood at 120 military observers and 11 police officers (see annex).

II. Political process

3. During the reporting period, UNOMIG, led by my Special Representative, continued efforts to promote stability in the zone of conflict and to facilitate dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides within the framework of the United Nations-led peace process. For that purpose, my Special Representative maintained regular contact with senior officials in Tbilisi and Sukhumi, with the Group of Friends and with the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator. On 2 May, in Moscow, she met with senior officials of the Russian Federation, namely, Andrey Denisov, First Deputy Foreign Minister, and Grigoriy Karasin, State Secretary and Deputy Foreign Minister. All of these activities sought to promote confidence between the sides with the ultimate aim of facilitating meaningful negotiations on a lasting and comprehensive settlement, taking into account the principles contained in the paper on "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi" (see S/2002/88, para. 3), as well as additional ideas the sides would be willing to offer with a view to conducting a constructive political dialogue under the aegis of the United Nations.

4. On 29 March, UNOMIG facilitated a visit to Sukhumi by Irakli Alasania, the adviser to the President of Georgia on conflict settlement issues and representative for the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiating process, for direct exchanges with Abkhaz officials, including the de facto President, Sergey Bagapsh. They discussed possible next steps in the peace process, including the documents on the non-use of force and

06-40149 (E) 050706

the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and the resumption of the Coordinating Council.

5. Following subsequent discussions and requests by both sides, my Special Representative convened the first session of the resumed Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on 15 May in Tbilisi. The Council, which was established in 1997, had not met since January 2001 (see S/2001/713, paras. 3 and 4). The session was held under the chairmanship of my Special Representative, with the participation of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides led, respectively, by Giorgi Khaindrava, State Minister for Conflict Resolution and Sergey Shamba, de facto Minister for Foreign Affairs; the Russian Federation as facilitator; the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Tbilisi-based ambassadors of the Group of Friends in their observer capacity. Representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also participated in deliberations on relevant agenda items. Welcoming the initiative of the two sides, my Special Representative highlighted calls upon them by the Security Council to make use of all existing mechanisms to come to a peaceful settlement. The participants agreed on an agenda, on a schedule of meetings for the Coordinating Council's three working groups — for security issues, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and socio-economic issues — and on reconvening in mid-July 2006 in accordance with its regular two-monthly meeting schedule.

6. Both sides used the resumption of the Coordinating Council and a meeting between Messrs. Alasania and Shamba, held on 24 May at the UNOMIG headquarters in Sukhumi, to exchange papers, ideas and proposals on ways to re-establish the political dialogue and promote the peace process. As differences on substantive issues persisted, including the status issue, they agreed to focus on informal consultations and on the elaboration of confidence-building measures. The Georgian and Abkhaz sides also confirmed their intention to continue work on the set of documents on the non-use of force and the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and on the preparation of a meeting of their highest authorities.

7. From 22 to 25 May, high-level representatives of the Group of Friends, together with my Special Representative, held meetings with the President and senior members of the Government of Georgia and with the Abkhaz leadership at the highest level. The Group of Friends was represented by Ambassador-at-large Norbert Baas of Germany; Frédéric du Laurens, Political Director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France; Mikhail Bocharnikov, Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict; Sir Brian Fall, Special Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the South Caucasus; and Matthew Bryza, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs of the United States of America. In all meetings, the Group of Friends reaffirmed the proposals and concerns expressed by the Security Council in its resolution 1666 (2006). In particular, the human rights situation in the Gali district, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and the non-use of force were discussed. The Group of Friends welcomed steps by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides to establish a closer dialogue and encouraged them to focus on practical steps to build confidence. They expressed appreciation for the cooperation between UNOMIG and the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

8. Despite these developments, tensions between the parties and in the wider region remained. The Georgian side expressed concerns over recourse to enemy stereotypes in public discourse and military exercises by the Abkhaz authorities. It continued to criticize the Abkhaz side and the CIS peacekeeping force for failing to ensure the safety of the local population and prevent human rights abuses in the Gali district, and it insisted on a change in the peacekeeping format. The Georgian side continued to attach particular importance to the establishment of a UNOMIG human rights sub-office and the deployment of the UNOMIG police component in the Gali district, the use of Georgian as the language of instruction in the Gali district schools and the property rights of internally displaced persons and refugees. The Abkhaz side was concerned about the use of militant rhetoric by Georgian officials and what it saw as a continued militarization of Georgia, including by the opening of a new military base in Senaki, near the conflict zone. It claimed that violence in the Gali district was provoked by groups sent from the Georgian-controlled side of the ceasefire line. In addition, new tensions emerged between Georgia and the Russian Federation, in particular following a Russian ban on some Georgian imports and the establishment of a Georgian governmental commission to assess the implications of a possible withdrawal of Georgia from CIS. Georgia protested the decision of the Russian Federation in April to lift restrictions on foreign nationals crossing the Abkhaz section of the Russian-Georgian border, and visits that Russian officials had made to Sukhumi without prior agreement with Tbilisi. On 13 June, Presidents Putin and Saakashvili met in St. Petersburg — their first meeting since 2004 — and discussed ways to address existing tensions.

9. UNOMIG continued to facilitate international visits to Sukhumi, including by the Ad Hoc Committee on Abkhazia of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on 12 April and a delegation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Parliamentary Assembly on 6 May.

III. Operational activities

10. During the reporting period, the security situation in the conflict zone remained generally calm. Two violations of the 1994 Moscow Agreement were reported: the use of mortars with a calibre exceeding 80 millimetres during a firing exercise in the Ochamchira training area in the restricted weapons zone on the Abkhaz side of the ceasefire line on 6 June; and a brief restriction on the movement of a UNOMIG patrol by Abkhaz security personnel on 24 May. Both violations were protested. From 24 to 27 March, the Abkhaz side conducted a command and staff mobilization exercise at battalion level, including a live artillery firing exercise which, following representations by UNOMIG, was relocated from Ochamchira to Bambora, near Gudauta, outside the restricted weapons zone.

11. The weekly quadripartite meetings allowed the two sides, together with UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force, to discuss security-related matters in the zone of conflict. The presence of Georgian and Abkhaz regional coordinators appointed in accordance with the 24 January 2006 Gali protocol (see S/2006/173, para. 3) and the efforts of UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force helped improve exchanges of information on criminal activities and cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the two sides.

Gali sector

12. The security situation in the Gali sector was generally calm. Following the killings in the Gali district in March 2006 (see S/2006/173, para. 10) and reports of the presence of an armed group in the vicinity, Abkhaz law enforcement agencies and the CIS peacekeeping force increased their activities in the area, including joint patrolling. The CIS peacekeeping force also provided escorts for public buses on market days in the lower Gali district and placed boxes for receiving anonymous complaints from the local population, including information regarding criminals. While those efforts contributed to a decrease in the crime rate, public apprehensions towards the de facto law enforcement agencies persisted in the Gali district. During the reporting period, 3 killings, including the killing of 2 alleged criminals as a result of an Abkhaz law enforcement operation, 3 kidnappings, 20 robberies, 7 shooting incidents and 18 detentions by Abkhaz de facto law enforcement agencies were recorded.

Zugdidi sector

13. The security situation in the Zugdidi sector remained generally calm, with three killings, six shooting incidents and seven robberies recorded. Operational and liaison patrols were conducted without hindrance.

Kodori Valley

14. No patrols were conducted in the Kodori Valley during the reporting period. On the basis of reports from the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, the CIS peacekeeping force and the HALO Trust, a British mine clearance organization, the situation in the Kodori Valley was assessed as generally calm. UNOMIG continued to engage with the Georgian side on the need for sufficiently robust security guarantees for the resumption of patrolling in the upper Kodori Valley.

Joint fact-finding group

15. During the reporting period, the joint fact-finding group, which includes the two parties, UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force, and which investigates alleged violations of the ceasefire agreement and other politically motivated violent acts in the conflict zone, closed five cases: the confiscation of cigarettes belonging to the CIS peacekeeping force on 31 August 2005; an improvised explosive device at Tagiloni East on 27 November 2005; a firing incident against an Abkhaz de facto militia post at Pirveli Otobaya on 11 December 2005; an explosion at Repo Etseri on 18 December 2005, which injured the local head of administration in the Gali security zone; and a firing incident on 21 December 2005 against a Georgian post at Orsantia, in the Zugdidi security zone. At present, four cases continue to be investigated and another six are in the process of being closed.

IV. Police

16. During the reporting period, UNOMIG police continued to operate on the Zugdidi side of the ceasefire line only. They conducted training courses on human rights and combating human trafficking and provided a range of specialized police training. A second group of law enforcement officers from Zugdidi left for Estonia to participate in a six-week training programme financed by the Governments of Estonia, Finland and Iceland. English language, computer and business administration courses were organized for female police officers in Zugdidi in preparation for their participation in the annual training conference of the International Association of Women Police, to be held in Canada in September. On 26 April, UNOMIG police participated in the first crime prevention committee session organized by the Zugdidi district administration, which was attended by 40 participants, including high-level officials.

17. UNOMIG police continued to provide expertise to the joint fact-finding group in investigating seven homicide cases. UNOMIG police presented a police vehicle equipped with forensic items and other equipment, donated by the Government of Italy, to the local militia in Gali. An identical police vehicle, also donated by the Government of Italy, was handed over to the Georgian police authorities in Zugdidi.

V. Cooperation with the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States

18. Cooperation between UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force continued in accordance with established practices, including regular liaison visits and exchange of information between the senior leadership of UNOMIG and the Commander of the CIS peacekeeping force, as well as at the operational level.

VI. Human rights and humanitarian situation

19. During the reporting period, the United Nations human rights office continued to implement the programme for the protection and promotion of human rights in Abkhazia, Georgia (see S/1996/284, annex I) by monitoring the human rights situation and taking measures to prevent and redress human rights violations. The office continued to provide human rights education and technical assistance to strengthen local non-governmental organizations and grass-roots initiatives. On the basis of information from victims, witnesses and other reliable sources, the office pursued reports of violations of due process; arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of detainees, including two deaths in custody; prolonged pre-trial detention; impunity; involuntary disappearances; and arbitrary evictions and other property rights violations. The office regularly visited detention facilities, provided legal advisory services to the local population and monitored court trials.

20. The Abkhaz side has not yet agreed to the opening of a UNOMIG human rights sub-office in the town of Gali, which would enhance the ability to protect the human rights of the local population, including returnees, in the zone of conflict. The continuing practice of abductions for ransom and robberies in the Gali district contributed to the perception of personal insecurity among the local population. Issues related to the language of instruction in the Gali district came to the forefront

in April when the district administration instructed local schools to teach in the Russian language during the 2006/07 school year and to implement the Russian language-based Abkhaz school curriculum.

21. In cooperation with local non-governmental organizations, the office continued its projects to support a confidential phone line for detainees, training of prison inmates to facilitate their reintegration into society upon release, free legal aid for vulnerable groups, a folklore festival of local ethnic groups, internet communication between family members separated by the conflict, and awareness initiatives on women's and children's rights. The office also launched the fifth phase of the "Assisting Communities Together" project, involving six local non-governmental organizations, funded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

22. In the humanitarian field, UNOMIG continued the implementation of quick-impact projects and of the first phase of the rehabilitation programme funded by the European Commission (see S/2005/657, para. 30). The Mission secured additional funding for the continued operation of the shuttle bus across the ceasefire line, which constitutes an important confidence-building measure.

23. United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations continued to assist vulnerable groups on the Abkhaz side of the ceasefire line. UNDP commenced an agricultural income-generating programme funded by the European Commission and the Government of Norway, and established an information centre in Sukhumi, in partnership with a local non-governmental organization. The United Nations Fund for Women has selected six local partners to form a women's network to focus on gender issues. The United Nations Children's Fund distributed, with support from UNOMIG, school supplies and sports kits to 125 schools and conducted a survey of the education system and infrastructure; it also supplied the local health-care system with essential drugs and equipment, including obstetric/delivery equipment, surgical equipment and resuscitation kits, and continued its extended programme of immunization. The World Food Programme (WFP), in partnership with World Vision, identified 28 micro-projects benefiting 15,000 people through the rehabilitation of abandoned arable land; the project, so far, has assisted around 8,000 students, including 730 in 47 schools in the Sukhumi, Ochamchira, Tkvarcheli and Gali districts. WFP also continued to provide food assistance to 70 tuberculosis patients in the Gulripshi tuberculosis hospital as part of an agreement with Médecins Sans Frontières.

24. UNHCR continued the implementation of its strategy of confidence-building together with its partner agencies, the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The strategy aims to build trust and confidence at the grass-roots level through protection monitoring and targeted assistance. UNHCR also conducted training sessions for local authorities in Gali. In response to the commitments made by both the Abkhaz and Georgian sides regarding the role of local non-governmental organizations, UNHCR is setting up a resource centre for such organizations in Gali. It continued discussions with both sides towards the implementation of the verification of the number of returnees and assessment of living conditions in the Gali district.

25. With funding from the Governments of the United States and the Netherlands, the HALO Trust continued mine-clearance activities, declaring the Gali district and

the Gumista River bank in Sukhumi effectively mine-free. The HALO Trust is clearing the last minefields in the Ochamchira district, the areas to the east of Sukhumi, and along the Gumista River Valley and, in May, it deployed teams to the Abkhaz-controlled areas of the Kodori Valley. The Danish Refugee Council continued its income-generating activities, including micro-finance for some 70 beneficiaries and 2 community-mobilization projects in Gali, and established 9 community cooperatives in the Gagra and Gudauta districts. The Norwegian Refugee Council rehabilitated two schools in Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli and continued its water and sanitation programme for six schools in the Sukhumi, Ochamchira and Gali districts. It also conducted a human rights course for teachers and pupils in Gali. Save the Children continued its HIV/AIDS awareness training for health providers and began renovating the Sukhumi AIDS centre. World Vision continued support for 60 families in Ochamchira, micro-credit activities in Gali and Sukhumi, and business and management education for the local university, local non-governmental organizations and district administrations.

VII. Support issues

26. The Mission leadership and administration continued to raise awareness among staff of United Nations rules and regulations relating to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. In particular, the Mission intensified induction training at all locations within the Mission area and established policies on staff recreation and welfare.

27. The Senaki airport was closed to UNOMIG as of 1 May 2006 and UNOMIG had to relocate its air operations to Kopitnari airport in Kutaisi. The relocation has doubled the road travel time between the airport and the Mission sectors' headquarters, thus creating additional logistical and operational constraints. UNOMIG has initiated the rehabilitation and repair of 29 kilometres of the main road between the Sukhumi and Gali sectors in order to continue providing uninterrupted services.

VIII. Observations

28. During the reporting period, my Special Representative and UNOMIG, supported by the Group of Friends, continued their efforts to facilitate and expand the dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides with a focus on practical steps and confidence-building in order to address substantive issues. The visit of high-level representatives of the Group of Friends reinforced those efforts. I welcome the visit, which underscored the importance the international community attaches to progress in the peace process. The impetus created by the visit should be utilized by the two sides to achieve tangible progress.

29. In this context, I urge the sides to implement the understandings reached during the February 2006 Geneva meeting of the Group of Friends, in particular regarding a meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides at the highest level without preconditions and the early finalization of the set of documents on the non-use of force and the return of internally displaced persons and refugees. At the same time, it is essential that both sides honour their previous commitments in an expeditious way — in particular, for the Georgian side to address the legitimate security

concerns of the Abkhaz side, and for the Abkhaz side to allow the opening of a human rights sub-office in Gali and the teaching of local youth in the Georgian language, and to accept the deployment of UNOMIG police officers in the Gali district. Joint efforts to combat crime in the zone of conflict would address an issue of mutual concern and, at the same time, could be an important confidence-building measure.

30. The resumption of the Coordinating Council and the activities of its three working groups is a welcome development. I encourage the parties to use all existing mechanisms to promote and widen their cooperation and dialogue. Recent exchanges of proposals and direct meetings between the sides have created an opportunity for resumption of a political dialogue on substantive issues of the conflict. While the principles for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict outlined in the paper on "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi" and its transmittal letter remain valid, the parties should consider and discuss their respective proposals in a constructive and creative manner. Ultimately, progress in the peace process is contingent on genuine political will from both sides to sustain the dialogue and to refrain from actions or rhetoric that may jeopardize it or the security arrangements underpinning it.

31. The security of United Nations personnel remains of primary concern. I again urge both sides to ensure the safety and security of all UNOMIG personnel working and living in the zone of conflict, including by identifying and bringing to justice perpetrators of criminal acts against UNOMIG and its personnel, including the shooting down of a UNOMIG helicopter in the Kodori Valley in October 2001, the ambush of a UNOMIG bus in Sukhumi in September 1998, and various hostage-taking incidents over the past several years. At the same time, the provision of sufficient security guarantees remains important for the resumption of regular UNOMIG patrols throughout the Kodori Valley, which is an essential part of the Mission's mandate.

32. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to my Special Representative, Heidi Tagliavini, the Chief Military Observer, Major General Niaz Muhammad Khan Khattak, and all the men and women of UNOMIG for their tireless and courageous work in a difficult and often dangerous environment and for their dedication in search of a peaceful and lasting solution to this conflict.

06-40149

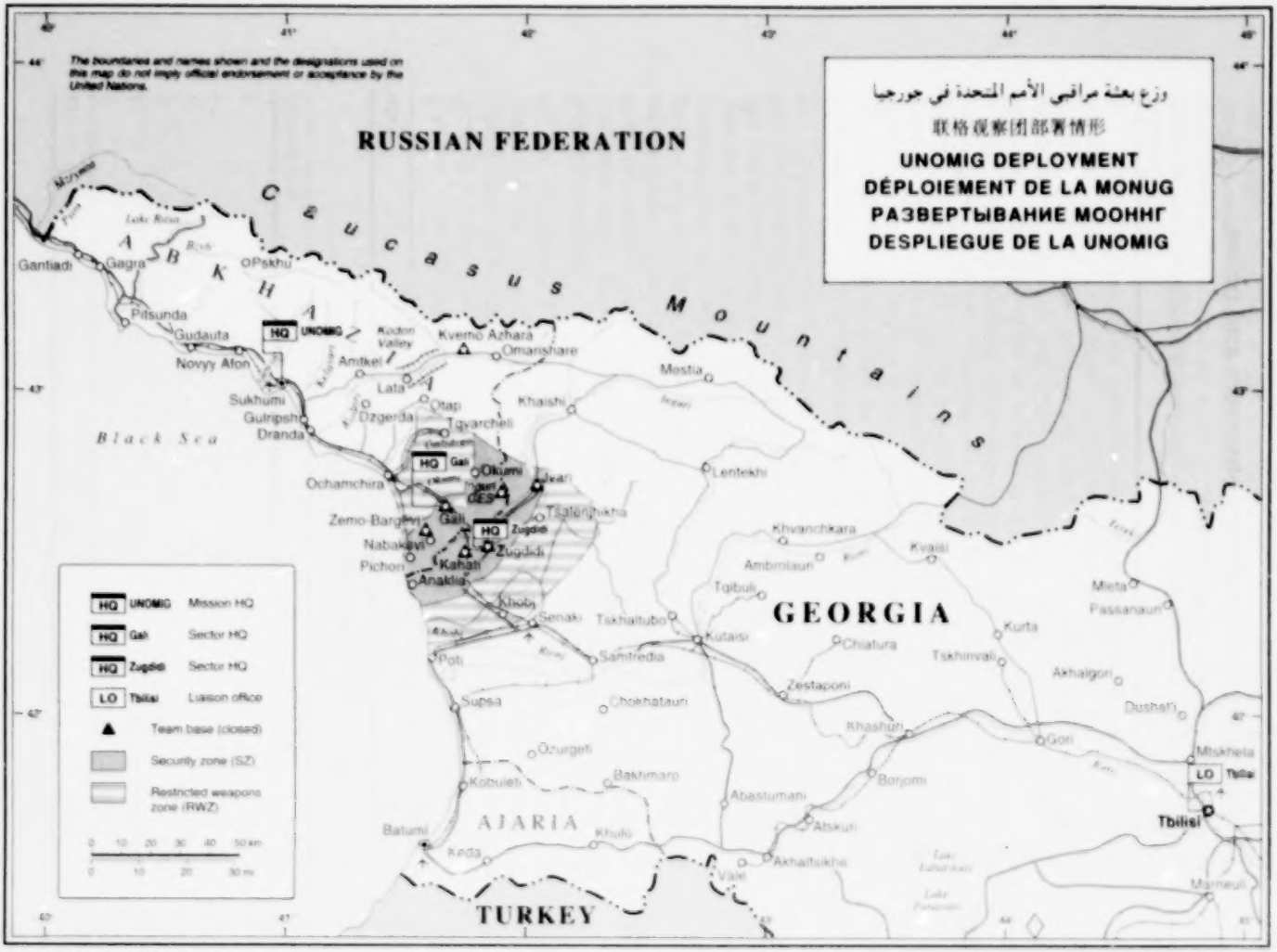
Annex

Countries providing military observers and police personnel (as at 1 June 2006)

Country	*Military observers*
Albania	3
Austria	2
Bangladesh	7
Croatia	1
Czech Republic	5
Denmark	5
Egypt	5
France	3
Germany	12
Greece	5
Hungary	7
Indonesia	4
Jordan	8
Pakistan	8*
Poland	5
Republic of Korea	7
Romania	1
Russian Federation	3
Sweden	3
Switzerland	4
Turkey	5
Ukraine	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	7
United States of America	2
Uruguay	3
Total	**120**

* Including the Chief Military Observer

Country	*Police personnel*
Germany	2
Ghana	1
India	2
Poland	2
Russian Federation	1
Switzerland	3
Total	**11**



Map No. 3837 Rev. 50 UNITED NATIONS
June 2006

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